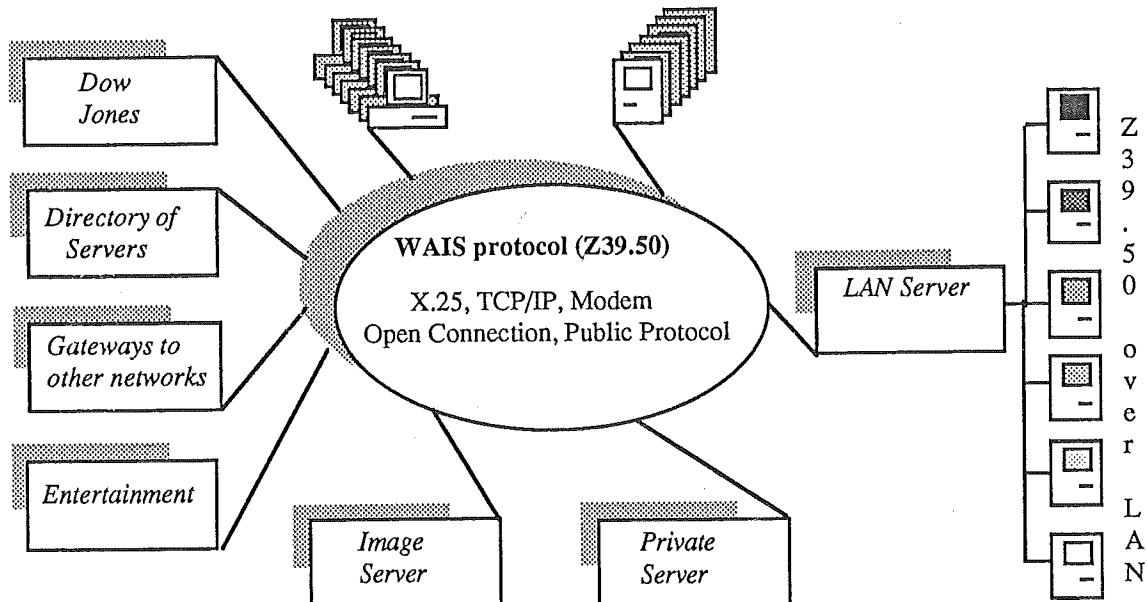


WAIS:

Wide Area Information Servers



WAIS—The Wide Area Information Servers system—is an electronic publishing software set which allows you to search out and retrieve multimedia information from databases anywhere in the world. This information can be drawn from data stored on your own desktop, in your organization's mainframe or in a supercomputer on another continent. WAIS software includes user interfaces for most platforms, and server software that provides automatic indexing of databases.

WAIS was developed by Thinking Machines Corporation of Cambridge, Massachusetts in collaboration with Apple Computer, Inc., Dow Jones & Company, and KPMG Peat Marwick. With over 100 databases and 5,000 users worldwide, WAIS is rapidly becoming a standard for information distribution within the Internet environment. Much of the software is currently available for free use.

What does WAIS do?

WAIS allows multimedia information to be stored anywhere on any platform. Using your interface of choice, WAIS enables you to find personal, corporate and public information. The information is accessible regardless of format: text, formatted documents, pictures, spreadsheets, graphics, sound, or video.

WAIS recognizes natural language queries—the search and retrieval of relevant information is made using your native language. To date, we have used English, French, Italian, and Latin! The most relevant documents, regardless of size, can be sent back to the server in their entirety to further refine your search (telling the server, "Find me more like this document.") Proven searches can be automatically repeated, monitoring and alerting you to new information as it becomes available.

How does WAIS work?

WAIS uses a single computer-to-computer protocol (NISO Z39.50). Each WAIS server reads your question and based on its words, searches the full text of the database for the most relevant documents, and ranks them using automatic word weighting. Servers need not "fully understand" your query; the retrieval process is based on a search method called "relevance feedback." Thinking Machines provides an implementation of Z39.50 to help vendors develop interfaces and servers.

What WAIS servers exist?

After six months of development, there are over 100 servers on the Internet. More than 5000 people have used WAIS in 20 countries.

- On one of its Connection Machine supercomputers tied to Internet, Thinking Machines maintains a number of free databases.
- MIT supports a poetry server with classical and modern poetry.
- Cosmic is serving descriptions of government software packages.
- The Library of Congress has plans to make their catalog available via the protocol.
- Weather maps and forecasts are made available by Thinking Machines.
- The "directory of servers" facility is operated by Thinking Machines; it registers, lists and describes the information available on each server, including any fees for its use.
- Dow Jones will have a server available on their DowVision network that will contain several months of the Wall Street Journal and 450 business publications, and will be a for-pay server.

How can I find out more about WAIS?

- You can try a simple interface by telnet to quake.think.com, login "wais".
- FTP the free software from think.com in the /wais directory.
- FTP a bibliography: /pub/wais/wais-discussion/bibliography.txt from quake.think.com
- Subscribe to wais-discussion-request@think.com, a biweekly email list on electronic publishing issues and WAIS releases

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